Conveying Concerns:

Women Report on Families in Transition

Population Reference Bureau

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Preface

Many features of modern life are changing the structure of households and the nature of family life. More women are seeking paid employment, and the number of single-parent and two-earner families is growing. At the same time, family members are more dispersed as those who might normally share a home leave their villages, towns, and even their countries to find work. In many parts of the world, people are living longer, and increasing numbers of older people are facing questions of where to live and how to support themselves. In some African countries, where AIDS is claiming the lives of millions of parents, older people are raising their orphaned grandchildren. While families have always adapted to new trends, the current changes appear to be coming faster than ever.

This *Conveying Concerns*, the fourth in a series compiled through the Women's Edition project of the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), highlights these changes in family life from the perspective of women journalists. (See a description of Women's Edition on page 35.) In 1999, PRB assembled senior journalists from 11 countries to discuss families in transition. The journalists subsequently produced special supplements in their newspapers and magazines as well as radio programs that highlighted local and international aspects of the issue. Excerpts from these supplements and programs are printed here.

The articles and scripts are abridged and appear in five sections, each with a brief introduction. These sections represent the specific topics addressed by the journalists. The first section looks at ways of defining the family and is followed by sections on families on the move, single-parent families, older relatives, and AIDS orphans. This booklet is by no means a comprehensive analysis of changes in the family. It is meant instead to highlight the ways people of varying cultural and economic situations are experiencing these changes. ■

Global Overview: Families in Transition

Recent demographic, socioeconomic, and technological changes that have had such a profound impact on the lives of people everywhere are transforming the family, a fundamental social institution. The spread of sophisticated communications technologies, global economic integration, and the sweeping devastation of AIDS make these times distinctive, and families are altering their living patterns to cope with the new realities.

Women are opting to enter the job market because they want to and need to earn independent incomes.

While globalization—the increasingly unfettered flow of information, goods, and capital across borders—has created growth in production and employment opportunities in some regions, the process has also increased inequality within and among nations and has had a major impact on the world of work. The lowering of barriers to trade and financial flows has led to heightened competition on the world market. Since countries and regions at varying stages of development cannot compete at the same level, however, not everyone benefits. The effects have been especially harsh in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in Eastern Europe and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union that have been reforming their economies. Countries in these regions have experienced increases in unemployment and in casual work (characterized by low and irregular wages and a lack of benefits), and overall reductions in living standards.[1] Globalization has also contributed to financial crises in Asia and Latin America as unregulated financial systems struggle to cope with sudden and rapid outflows of capital.[2]

Ever sensitive to social and economic changes, especially to uncertainties in job markets, families are reacting to the new realities in several ways. Family members are leaving rural homes for towns and villages in increasing numbers and others are crossing national borders in larger numbers to try to improve their living standards. When they face economic uncertainty, families also tend to send more of their members, including women and children, outside the home to seek work, and poor households pursue a range of informal activities to survive.[3]

Concerns about the economy as well as changes in women's aspirations are bringing women into the workforce as never before. Women are opting to enter the job market because they want to and need to earn independent incomes. In times of economic difficulty, women's economic contribution to the household budget and the family's well-being increases. The International Labour Organization (ILO) says that women's participation in paid work has increased significantly since the beginning of the 1980s. In fact, women are now more than 40 percent of the global workforce, even though they continue to be concentrated in low-paid, low-skilled jobs.[4]

As women enter the workforce in greater numbers and gain more autonomy, the numbers of two-earner and single-parent (mainly woman-headed) families worldwide have risen and the proportion of workers who juggle competing job and family responsibilities has grown.[5] A look at U.S. families between 1950 and 1999 shows that a rise in women's labor force participation has helped transform families. The traditional, nuclear family of working father, homemaker mother, and at least one child accounts for just 13 percent of married couple households and 7 percent of all U.S. households.[6]

The traditional, gender-based division of duties and responsibilities within the

home does not reflect current realities, and women appear to be paying the highest cost for the changes. As they work in increasing numbers outside the home, women continue to bear the brunt of childrearing and household chores. A United Nations Development Programme study shows that this situation creates a double burden for women. In addition, women's status within the home has not significantly improved.[7] Instead of gaining more control over their lives, women may face many conflicts as they try to balance their roles at home and at work. Their inability to shed some domestic responsibilities may even result in lower career mobility.[8] As a result, women are seeking ways to involve their partners more in childrearing and household duties.

Economic uncertainty is also driving both internal and international migration, particularly in less developed countries. The share of the world's population living in urban areas rose from just about one third in 1960 to 47 percent in 1999—a roughly 30 percent increase. Family members are also leaving their native country in search of jobs. The number of international migrants rose by roughly 38 percent between 1965 and 1990, from 75 million people to 120 million people.

All these trends have brought attention to the ways families adapt to modern life. The United Nations has long recognized the family as the basic unit of society and has advocated policies for the support and protection of family members. The world community went a step further in 1994 at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, agreeing that various forms of the family exist in different social, cultural, legal, and political systems.[9] Governments at the UN conference acknowledged that national policies and programs have largely ignored this reality.

Understandably, definitions of "the family" vary—despite the historic centrality of the nuclear unit. "Family" can be a group of people held together by birth, marriage, or adoption or by common residence or close emotional attachment.[10] Families may include persons who claim descent from common ancestors in a lineage, tribe, or clan.[11] Though marriage often signals the beginning of a family, informal unions, sanctioned by neither church nor state, are common. They include cohabitation as well as consensual, visiting, and homosexual unions. As new communications technology helps bring people around the world together, definitions of "the family" may well continue to expand.

Certain demographic trends are also leaving their mark on the family. In most parts of the world, women and men are living longer. Greater life expectancy and lower fertility have contributed to increasing proportions of older people in the population, a phenomenon mainly associated with more developed nations. This increased life expectancy is creating multigenerational families and extending the time working adults must help support their retired parents.[12] All this is occurring as less developed countries with continuing high birth rates support large numbers of young people, the parents of tomorrow. In these countries, 34 percent of the population is 15 years old or younger, and 5 percent of the population has reached the 65-year mark.[13] The contrast is less marked in more developed countries, where 14 percent of the population is in the older category, and 19 percent is in the younger group.

Various forms of the family exist in different social, cultural, legal, and political systems.

Another feature of our times is the increased dispersion of families. Even as these older and younger generations place greater demands on the family, vital family support networks are unraveling. As young people migrate to towns and cities, they are leaving behind grandparents and other relatives who had traditionally played a key role in their lives. The dispersion of families in less developed regions has generally been attributed to labor migration as well as to refugee movements spurred by famine, disease, environmental degradation, and political unrest.[14] In addition, displaced people, who number more than 20 million around the world, are losing family members through death or separation.[15] Dispersion, moreover, means that more elderly people live alone. Also, increasing numbers of children are orphaned. One of the most tragic consequences of the AIDS epidemic is the loss of millions of parents and the creation of vast numbers of orphans in Africa. Around the world, more than 13 million children under 15 years old—95 percent of them in Africa—have lost either a mother or both parents to AIDS, according to new estimates.[16]

Overall, the burden of HIV/AIDS, the concentration of women in low-paid jobs, and the erosion of traditional family support networks are some of the biggest threats to families, particularly in less developed nations. The 1994 Cairo conference agreed to address these realities. A plan adopted by more than 180 nations calls for collaboration between governments and employers to help parents balance home and job responsibilities through such means as health insurance and social security programs, day-care centers, paid parental and maternity leave, and reproductive and child health services. The plan also calls for increasing the earning power of adult members of low-income families, particularly single parents who support children and elderly relatives. The recommendations offer a guidepost for those working in communities around the world for social and economic policies that fully respond to the diverse and changing needs of families. ■

DEFINING THE FAMILY

No single definition of "the family" captures the many forms of family units around the world. The question of who lives with whom and how large the family unit is varies among and within societies. Furthermore, new economic and demographic trends are rapidly changing family lifestyles and composition across the globe, breaking down traditional notions of women's and men's roles in the home.

Given that the family is a fundamental social institution and that male-female unions have historic significance, discussions on family formations tend to be highly politicized. In general, families include groups of two or more adults who perform separate tasks, and share such things as a residence, social activities, and emotional ties.[17] While marriage between a man and a woman is widely seen as the first step in family formation, many other types of unions exist, including cohabitation, visiting, consensual, and homosexual unions. The majority of families, however, comprise mother and father and children, a mother and her children, or a childless couple, with grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and other kin living either close by or far away.[18] The world community took a major step at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo when it acknowledged the many family forms around the world.

As poverty, urbanization, international migration, wars, and other factors place increasing strain on family networks, countries and communities are seeking laws and policies to support and protect the family and its members. The Programme of Action adopted in Cairo urges governments to create policies for housing, labor, health, social security, and education to support family life. The Programme also recommends that governments and other relevant institutions develop the means to monitor the impact of social and economic decisions and actions on the well-being of families, on women's status within families, and on the ability of families to meet the basic needs of their members.

Viva, Costa Rica
November 15, 1999

Families of the New Millennium

by Thaís Aguilar

The concept of family is broadening. Now, it includes everybody who lives under one roof and expresses love and solidarity.

Magaly has two small children. She lives with them and with her mother who takes care of them while she works. Who can say that this isn't the family of the future?

Blood ties no longer appear to be the parameters that define family.

The traditional concept of "the family" —comprised of a mother, father and children—is changing. This model, called the nuclear family, will continue to be the central axis of our societies, but the next century will see the consolidation of other, no less important systems.

The International Foundation for the Global Economic Challenge (FIDEG) holds that a family is comprised of everybody, whether related or not, who lives in the same dwelling. Blood ties no longer appear to be the parameters that define family. Costa Rica is not unfamiliar with these new structures of living together which Costa Rican demographer Luis Rosero calls "*sui generis* families."

"What's happening is that the concept of the nuclear family is increasingly less common in other societies. In Costa Rica, it has been gaining ground, but it's likely that in the future other concepts of family will live here in greater strength," Rosero told *Viva*.

The expert explained that in Costa Rica, there are various family models: the classical nuclear family, comprised of the father, the mother and the children; the extended family, which was common in yesterday's Costa Rica and includes the unmarried aunt, a grandparent, an orphan cousin; single-parent families: men or women who live with their children; and modern families, which are those in which persons remarry and each one brings his or her own children.

Luis Rosero explained that modern families will be more common in the Costa Rica of the future. Rosero also stated that *sui generis* families are being organized. Members of a homosexual couple who live together, for example, fall into that particular category.

Two distinguished American family therapists, Marianne and Suzanna Walters—mother and daughter—agree that lifestyles and the reality of current society force us to rethink the concept of nuclear family. For example, in the United States, 50 percent of children are the sons and daughters of single mothers or fathers, but especially of single women.

In Costa Rica, according to the State of the Nation Report, the number of women heads of household has increased by 20 percent. In all, 52 percent of Costa Rican families are comprised of a heterosexual couple and their sons and daughters. Women, however, head 90 percent of the remaining 48 percent of families. The Walters therapists say that at this stage in human history it makes no sense to think that a family comprises "a man, a woman, sons, and daughters," because that is not how society lives. ■

"Focus,"
Ghana Broadcasting
Corporation, Ghana
October 4, 1999

Families in Transition

SARAH AKROFI-QUARCOO: Hello, and welcome to "Focus." Today, panelists will critically examine some of the challenges facing the modern family and the implications for social policy. I am Sarah Akrofi-Quarcoo. On the panel today are Dr. Clara Fayorsey, senior lecturer of the Sociology Department of the University of Ghana; Minister of Mobilization and Social Welfare, Alhaji Mohammed Mumuni; and Mrs. Angela Dwamena Aboagye, women and children's rights advocate.

MS. AKROFI-QUARCOO: What is the family, Dr. Fayorsey?

DR. FAYORSEY: The word "family" is very difficult to define, because it varies from society to society. In one sense, it means blood relations, people who are descended from a common ancestor. In another sense, it may mean people of the same household including husband, wife, children, and servants, and sometimes even lodgers. It is the basic unit of society, and it is characterized or is supposed to be characterized by certain things like common residence, economic cooperation, reproduction. And it can, in the technical sense, include adults of both sexes, their own children, and adopted children. There may be different forms of the family. So, we have nuclear family, we have extended family, we have polygamous families, compound families, and so on.

MS. AKROFI-QUARCOO: Why is the family so important to society? Why is everybody talking about the family as the basic unit of society?

MR. MUMUNI: The family is important because as you know, it is really the reference point in life for the people that are in that family. They are able to define their own position with reference to their family. And also, it is the primary socializer for our children.

MS. AKROFI-QUARCOO: Recently, family has become such a controversial issue when it is linked to issues like abortion and women's rights. Angela, you are a women's rights advocate. What do you think?

"The roles of the members of the family, as traditionally defined, are continuing to shift and change."
—Alhaji Mohammed Mumuni

MRS. ABOAGYE: The family is a sphere of life that nurtures human beings. At the same time, the family represents a place where you find the most pervasive forms of abuse against women and children, and where you find the kinds of situations that are difficult to handle on an official basis. Now you find that things are changing, and women are not prepared to just sit down and let one person be the family head from whom all orders, decisionmaking responsibility, and everything comes. Women are also bearing more responsibility, and definitely this is going to challenge the very basis of families as we see them.

MS. AKROFI-QUARCOO: Mr. Mumuni?

MR. MUMUNI: As a unit of society, the family is under serious pressure and stress from all kinds of factors. As a result, the roles of the members of the family, as traditionally defined, are continuing to shift and change. And with these changes in roles, demands begin to be made. For instance, women are taking on more and more responsibilities and therefore correspondingly, there is the need to adjust the power … relations in the family, but this is often also resisted. ■

SINGLE PARENTS

Families in which children are raised by only one parent are now more common around the world. Migration, separation, divorce, and widowhood are influencing this trend. Women who have never been married and who live without a partner also account for an increasing proportion of single-parent families. While mothers often head such families, fathers, grandmothers, aunts, or other female relatives may be single parents.

Women's increased ability to earn an income is also influencing the growth in single-parent families, since those with independent incomes are better able to cope on their own. The International Labour Organization reports that economic need and changes in women's perceptions of their social roles and priorities have led to more women entering the workforce in the last few decades. As a result, the gap between male and female labor force participation has narrowed and the number of two-earner and single-parent families has increased—although earning power is still lower among women.[19]

As women tend to be younger than their male partners and have longer life expectancies, widowhood is also a cause of single parenthood. In African countries most seriously affected by AIDS, a substantial number of families are losing one or both parents to the epidemic.

As more people balance job and family duties, governments and the private sector are urged to promote greater compatibility between work-force participation and family responsibilities, especially for single parents. The Programme of Action adopted at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development recommends that special attention be paid to the provision of health insurance and social security, day-care centers and facilities for breastfeeding, kindergartens, part-time jobs, paid parental leave, flexible work schedules, and reproductive and child-health services.

Femina, India
November 15, 1999

Is Yours a Y2K Family? Single Mothers

by Sathya Saran

By 1990, one out of every three families in America was headed by a single parent. India is, at the close of the millennium, in the process of catching up. Ask anyone in your family to name a single-parent family, and each member will offer at least one example.

Most single-parent homes today are headed by women. Women who have been divorced, widowed, abandoned, or who have chosen to walk out. Women whose husbands are working in another city or country and visit only two or three times a year. More rarely, women who choose to adopt or have a child despite being single. Women, thus, who bring up families alone.

"I know I am in charge, and I don't have to pretend I am not."
—Single Mom

The U.S., says Marianne Walters in *The Invisible Web: Gender Patterns in Family Relationships* (1988), tends to believe children of female-headed, single-parent families are always troubled, disruptive, and unhappy. Despite evidence to the contrary, this protects the myth that only a two-parent household can produce children who can grow up to be balanced, productive adults.

In India, we are less unkind. Somewhere, the single mother is still viewed with a compassionate eye. We stop to marvel at the way young Mrs. L, whose husband ran off with his secretary, has learnt to cope; at the fact that she rides a scooter now, and drops her daughter to school before going off to her workplace. We make doleful faces at the plight of poor Mrs. R, widowed with two children, and we wonder how she makes ends meet on her single salary.

Single mothers are seen as more overworked, harassed, and psychotic than mothers in 'complete families,' though the converse may well be true. In fact, single mothers have a clear line of authority, and once they have met with and coped with their chosen or imposed single status, they do a great job of buckling down to being chief provider, cheerleader, army major, and odd-job woman, all in one. At least, as one single mom put it, "I know I am in charge, and I don't have to pretend I am not."

But women who head households in India do ride the seesaw. "Getting an electrician or a plumber to set a problem right can be a pain," a Mombai company executive says. "I juggle six-figure accounts at work; but to the plumber, I'm just another woman who can't fix a leaking faucet or a pipe. Either he will try to rip me off or I will have to sweet-talk him into giving me his ear so I can explain the problem."

"I had to fight for my rights as a parent in my son's school," Ambuja Patwardham, a cost accountant, says. "It's tough explaining that I am the father, too."

"Society has to evolve to take in woman-headed families," Rita Verma of Bangalore adds. "Women are game to the challenge, but everyone tries so hard to put them in their place." ■

Parents, Kenya
November 1999

Single Parents: The Changing Face of the Family*

Adapted by Eunice N. Mathu

The issue of families consisting of a father, mother, and child is almost a myth. Now, more than ever, we are seeing a generation of single-parent households. Most of them are the result of divorce, death, abandonment, or separation.

Separation and divorce

Although there are no statistics on divorces in Kenya, it is well known that spouses are separating because of various reasons, high among them, domestic violence. In Kenya, the percentage of marriages dissolved through separation, divorce, or death among women ages 40-49 in 1989 was 24.2 percent. The number has increased over the last 10 years.

Separation or divorce, especially in Africa, may stigmatise a mother, reducing her social status and shrinking her support network in cases where her community members or her ex-partner's kin reject her.

Widowhood

Given that women usually have a higher life expectancy than men, and that women are usually younger—sometimes considerably younger—than the men they marry, a far greater proportion of women than men will be left without a spouse.

In less developed countries like ours, where spousal age differences are traditionally large (7-10 years), widows are often left with dependent children.

Widowhood can have serious financial consequences for women who may lose property as well as spousal income when their husbands die. In much of sub-Saharan Africa, widows often do not inherit from their husbands. After death, it is not uncommon for his kin to take away all of his key possessions.

Polygamy and multiple unions

Polygamy is recognised traditionally as a legal institution. Polygamous men in positions of influence and relative wealth often contract second and third marriages with women who are much younger than they are. The percentage of women 35-39 years in polygamous unions in Kenya in 1988/89 was 25 percent.

Social norms and legal systems that encourage or do not censure men's multiple sexual partners are likely to leave many of the women who become mothers through such unions economically vulnerable. Few men have sufficient wealth to adequately support multiple families and invest equally in each mate and her offspring, yet men continue to father children with multiple partners, often late into their lives.

Non-marital childbearing

Within the universe of mother-supported families, those that spring from early unplanned childbearing are arguably the most socially marginalised. Unprotect-ed early sexual activity often robs a girl of her childhood, impoverishes her adulthood and compromises the future of her children. As unmarried, adolescent mothers are likely to have less education, low (if any) income, and an uncertain claim on the father's earnings (if he has any), their prospects are often grim.

Some of the best supported single mothers are those with migrant husbands.

*Adapted from *Families in Focus: New Perspectives on Mothers, Fathers, and Children*, Judith Bruce, Cynthia B. Lloyd, et al. (New York: The Population Council, 1995).

Bonds between unmarried, pregnant, adolescent women and the fathers of their children-to-be are typically weak. Even when an unplanned pregnancy leads to marriage, the union is often unstable.

Rural-urban migration

Labour migration may lead to de facto single parenthood for a mother whose migrant husband is absent for extended periods. In regions where migration flows are increasing, single parenthood may be common.

While some of the best supported single mothers are those with migrant husbands or male kin who send back remittances on a steady basis, for many mothers and children, the benefits of male migration are illusory. Men (and women) may initially leave home to earn wages for the family's benefit, but their commitment to sending money home, or the practical possibility of doing so, sometimes fades. Even repeated day- or week-long absences can weaken mothers' and children's claims to the fathers' earnings.

Men's role in single parenthood

When one looks at the causes of single parenthood, the picture is clear that most women are faced with the tough responsibility of taking care of the children that arise from marital or non-marital unions. While women's lives have been characterised primarily in terms of motherhood, men's lives have been characterised largely without reference to fatherhood.

A father's involvement with his children is often influenced by the state of the father-mother relationship, notably the strength and exclusivity of the bond, and by the family's living arrangements. Some men see parenting and marriage as part of the same bargain. It is as if they stop being fathers as soon as the marriage is over. ■

Parents, Kenya
November, 1999

Husband Dies of AIDS, Now a Single Mother of Three

Life expectancy among men in Kenya is lower than that of women. This fact, coupled with the AIDS epidemic, has led to women being left behind as single parents when their children are still young.

The case of 34-year-old Veronica (not her real name) whose husband succumbed to AIDS six months ago and left her with three children is common in Kenya. After 13 years of marriage, Veronica thought that her future with her husband was a rosy one and that they would live long enough to see their own grandchildren. The shock that her husband would die young and leave her a widow came in 1997 when she was pregnant with their last child. Her husband had been diagnosed with HIV but had not told her.

For the last two-and-a-half years, Veronica has battled the thought that she herself was HIV positive. But she has now undergone two tests that have both been negative. Her last child, who was born one-and-a-half years ago, is also healthy.

Although Veronica has a steady job, she feels that it is not enough to bring up her children. Her expenses have doubled since she now has to move out of the company house that they had occupied when her husband was alive. In addition, her eldest daughter is about to enter secondary school.

"I cannot rely on my salary alone. I need to invest in something on the side to supplement what I earn," she says.

Veronica counts herself lucky that she was able to plan ahead and secure her husband's assets for the future of their children before he died. Most women are not so lucky. They end up having to fight with their in-laws for their husband's property.

Veronica wants to see her children grow into healthy and responsible adults. She is amazed at how much her children know about AIDS. She advises parents, single and married alike, never to take their children for granted however young they may be. ■

She was able to plan ahead and secure her husband's assets.

FAMILIES ON THE MOVE

In less developed countries, the search for higher standards of living leads to internal and international migration. As investment and employment opportunities shift from place to place in a global economy, families are becoming more dispersed, and women's responsibilities in the family are increasing. In search of work, individual family members are leaving poor, rural areas, small cities and towns, or even their countries. As a result, spouses and partners, older adults, children, and other relatives who might traditionally have shared a home are increasingly living apart. Young people are separated from older relatives who would have played a key role in their lives, elderly people are more likely to live alone, and the number of single-parent families is growing.

The number of international migrants—people who voluntarily leave their countries to live elsewhere—grew from 75 million to 120 million people between 1965 and 1990.[20] These migrants generally contribute to the family's economic well-being as they send money back home. In the past, men were typically the ones to leave home in search of work, but more women are now migrating on their own or as the primary earners within their families, even if they can only get temporary work in low-paid jobs. The most recent UN data show that women were 47 percent of all international migrants in 1990.[21]

In addition to migration for work, refugee movements caused by conflict, famine, and disease have dispersed families. As these trends continue, traditional family structures are falling apart and the extended family, particularly in less developed countries, is in crisis.[22] Communities and countries face the challenge of meeting the needs of millions of children and youths who are left to their own devices in urban areas and who are exposed to such risks as labor exploitation, sexual exploitation, unwanted pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections. Major responsibilities include ensuring that these young people have access to health services as well as to education and employment. Governments also face the challenge of improving living conditions and increasing employment opportunities and job training in rural areas to reduce the factors that push people to the cities. Some are also encouraging the growth of smaller urban centers to foster a more balanced distribution of their countries' populations.

"North American Connection," Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, Ghana October 19, 1999

Those We Left Behind

In a radio broadcast, *Nana Ayensua-Amonoo* and *Richard Quarshigah* discuss with Minister of Employment and Social Welfare *Alhaji Mohammed Mumuni* the impact on the family when a parent and partner migrates.

Lots of people have left behind their sons, daughters, wives, husbands.

NANA AYENSUA-AMONOO: This is "North American Connection."

RICHARD QUARSHIGAH: With us in the studio is the Minister of Employment and Social Welfare, Alhaji Mohammed Mumuni. We are talking about families in transition. Lots of people have left behind their sons, daughters, wives, husbands, as they journey to foreign lands.

MR. MUMUNI: We have been routinely receiving complaints from aggrieved family members at our various offices at the Department of Social Welfare—lots of complaints arising from this phenomenon of separation or the destabilisation of the family through the impact of technological change and arising from migration.

MR. QUARSHIGAH: How have you been addressing them?

MR. MUMUNI: As social welfare professionals, the idea is always to make contact with the parties involved and to try to get them to realise their social responsibilities to each other.

MR. QUARSHIGAH: Is your ministry, which is also responsible for employment, happy about this situation of Ghanaians moving out there, seeking greener pastures, and repatriating foreign exchange?

MR. MUMUNI: If people can get out and employ their labour beneficially and then repatriate some of their earnings into the system, it's definitely beneficial to our economy and to the dependents that they've left behind.

MS. AYENSUA-AMONOO: Let's look at another scenario. These people have gone and they're not sending back foreign exchange, but rather have left behind families—wives and also children who depend on single parents.

MR. MUMUNI: That is exactly true, because as much as there are benefits, it is true that some people get out there and for whatever reason, they do not live up to their responsibilities to their families. The families are exposed to all kinds of hardship. Delinquency sets in when the children do not get the desired care and attention. The side effects are there. We have situations of child delinquency and we end up with social problems as a direct result of the migration of some of these people.

MR. QUARSHIGAH: What major policy does the ministry have in place to lessen these kinds of effects?

MR. MUMUNI: There are quite a lot of things that we are trying to do by way of policy to contain the situation that you have described. One of the basic interventions that we're making is to strengthen the family base. We're going beyond the nuclear family. We're talking about the traditional Ghanaian family with all the implications of social protection that's embedded in it. There is real support in the extended family system for people who are in distressed situations, like unemployed people, people with disabilities, people with ailments, older people, and of course people who have lost their dependency through migration. ■

OLDER RELATIVES

Greater numbers of people are living longer as medical technologies advance and health care services and nutrition improve in many countries around the world. The population of people ages 60 years and older is expected to increase by 67 percent over the next two decades—from slightly more than 600 million to more than 1 billion by 2020.[23] In some regions, the number of older people is growing rapidly. This is occurring as declines in infant and child mortality and greater access to education and family planning services in these regions support a trend toward fewer children. While the growth of the older population in relation to younger generations is already a factor in more developed countries, the trend is just beginning in less developed regions.[24]

These trends are presenting families with new challenges. As women generally live longer than men and thus outnumber them in the older age groups, greater numbers of older women are having to cope with the deaths of partners and spouses as they make decisions about where to live and how to support themselves. Since women are paid less than men throughout their lives and are more likely to have part-time or casual employment, as more women age, they are more susceptible to poverty and social exclusion. Inheritance laws as well as cultural norms and practices that favor men and boys also place older women at a disadvantage.

Moreover, the dispersion of families through urbanization, international migration, and other factors disrupts traditional family ties and structures. In communities where multiple generations once lived under the same roof and where older people played a role in caregiving and other responsibilities, elderly people are now increasingly living alone. On the other hand, older people in AIDS-affected countries are being left to raise their orphaned grandchildren.

Nations face the challenge of devising adequate policies and programs for medical care, social welfare programs, and pension funds, and of addressing the special needs of older women.

Parents, Kenya
November 1999

Have We Forgotten the Aged?

With changing lifestyles, dictated by socioeconomic forces, family social setups that encouraged togetherness among members earlier in the century are disintegrating, and the younger generations are leaving their ancestral homes to settle elsewhere.

In the past, most people were concentrated in the rural areas and their economic well-being was based on farming. People did not depend on a salary or employment to feed and take care of their families. Families were closely knit and the extended unit ruled the day. With the coming of Europeans toward the end of the last century and industrialisation in this century, people started looking for further income from employment to supplement farming. This brought about rural-to-urban migration.

When the extended family unit is gone, the first casualties are usually the less able-bodied persons in the family.

This migration meant that the extended family unit was broken. Mostly, the father, who was the head of the family, would leave home in search of employment. This meant that the woman was now the "head" of the homestead. This change in headship of families meant that the woman had a lot on her hands and could not give the same attention to her in-laws the way her husband did. In cases where both the man and the woman left the rural areas in search of work in urban areas, aging parents were left alone.

According to psychologist Dr. Samuel Gatere, when the extended family unit is gone, the first casualties are usually the less able-bodied persons in the family. These include children, the disabled, and the aged. In the extended family pattern, the responsibility of taking care of the aged was shared. But without the extended family, no one feels responsible for taking care of the older relatives.

"Here in Kenya, we should have day-care centers for the aged, where they can interact with other people, take exercise classes, have meals designed for their nutritional needs, and maybe get someone to come and give them a talk on issues that affect them," says the psychologist.

Dr. Gatere explains that whatever is happening today is due to the fact that the society is in transition. And when this is the case in any given society, it means that social networks are broken. Values are misplaced, and there are no particular guidelines that support the society.

The elderly play a significant role and can be encouraged to do much more. There are many grandparents today looking after their grandchildren. The AIDS epidemic has also placed the responsibility of looking after AIDS orphans in the hands of grandparents, as most AIDS victims are young parents 20-49 years old.

There are many organisations in Kenya today working for the aged. HelpAge Kenya, for example, runs a programme dubbed, "Adopt a Granny." The programme identifies an aged person in the community who is put up for "adoption." Whatever contribution you give when you adopt this person, goes toward covering medical and physical needs. ■

Parents, Kenya
November 1999

A Day in a Home for the Aged

by Florence Machio

According to HelpAge Kenya, there are 14 homes for the aged in the country, with five of these situated in Nairobi. Most of these homes were once run by the Nairobi City Council but were later handed over to religious organisations to manage. A lack of funds set aside by the government to manage the homes was the main reason the City Council transferred their management to religious organisations.

One such home was *Mji wa Huruma*. Situated near the up-market Runda estate in Nairobi, *Mji wa Huruma* was started some 35 years ago to house the aged. Major Mary Birengo, the manager who has been at the home for the last two years, explains that most children who take their parents to the home forget about them. The Nairobi City Council is expected to support the home financially by covering a quarter of the running costs.

"This money sometimes comes; other times it does not. And even when it does, it never comes on time," explains Major Birengo. "The rest of the support comes from the Salvation Army and HelpAge Kenya. But these funds are not enough to keep the home running," she adds, noting that they will soon be forced to ask for admission fees from those accommodated at the home.

Most of the 25 residents of the home (five women and 20 men) need special health care, and the money they get is not enough to provide this. The home has about 12 workers who need to be paid and there are other bills like water and electricity. Major Birengo urges industries to channel their rejected products, such as blankets, to the home. She appeals to Kenya Power & Lighting Company not to be too hasty in disconnecting their electricity when the bill is not settled on time.

Meet Mzee Alexander Kerongi arap Korir. Except for his walking stick, you would think he was 60 years old, but he was born 90 years ago in Kapsabet. He can spend hours telling you about how he fought in World War I and World War II. He remembers vividly how he had to leave his family and go to war in different parts of the world. Mzee Korir has been at this home since January. He was brought to *Mji wa Huruma* by a social worker after he was found loitering in the streets of Kapsabet town with nowhere to go.

His family and children have all died and he has never owned land, since he was busy fighting the World Wars as well as the freedom struggle for this country. He returned home after ensuring that the colonialists were finally going to grant Kenya independence to find all members of his family dead. He had no choice but to start doing odd jobs at farms in the Rift Valley. At his last job, Mzee Korir was responsible for milking cows and looking after other farm animals. He counts himself lucky that at least he has a place to sleep and people of his age group to talk to. But he cannot hide his joy when he gets a visitor. He says people who fought the World Wars and the struggle for freedom in this country have not been given the recognition they deserve. He says that society should never forget the older generation, as "they have important information to pass down to you. Don't let us take this knowledge to our graves." ■

Most children who take their parents to the home forget about them.

22, Romania
November 2, 1999

Home Care for Older People

Madalina Schiopu interviewed *Dr. Aurelia Curaj*, president of the Geron Foundation, which provides home-care services for older people.

"It is to their advantage to be helped at home."
—Dr. Aurelia Curaj

MADALINA SCHIOPU: When did the Geron Foundation begin its activities and on what resources has it performed its activities so far?

DR. AURELIA CURAJ: The Geron Foundation was created in 1991 and it first functioned on the basis of the voluntary work of its founders. After that, when trying to support the first free program for assistance without hospitalization for older people, the foundation was contacted by a Dutch organization which financed the first program in 1995. After we had proved that we could partially support ourselves, they invested in that program, which is at the top of our agenda. We deal basically with home-care services for older people. Why home care? It is to their advantage to be helped at home. The alternative would be to take them out of their environment and to send them to institutions that are already crowded.

MS. SCHIOPU: How many people work for your foundation?

DR. CURAJ: We have full-time employees and part-time employees on several programs. The medical assistance without hospitalization requires three doctors, one of whom is a regular employee, another is a part- time employee, and the third one is a volunteer. The home-care program requires a team of professionals, the most important being the "community" nurses. We also have a sociopsychologist. Two women are housekeepers, and they go home to the old people. They clean their houses, cook for them, and wash their clothes.

MS. SCHIOPU: How will Geron House work? What services will it provide?

DR. CURAJ: Geron House, an institution for older people which is being built in the vicinity of our center, is the final stage of a project that the Netherlands sponsored for Romania in 1995. Our part of the deal was to persuade the town officials to offer free space for building this institution. It took us three years to get the piece of land. With great efforts, the city officials, more precisely the Bucharest City Hall, finally offered us 40,000 square meters for the construction. The institution will have a nursing center to help more than 500 old people at their homes.

MS. SCHIOPU: Is Geron House built exclusively on foreign funds?

DR. CURAJ: Unfortunately, yes. We will see how to raise some more funds. ■

AIDS ORPHANS*

Around the world, more than 13 million children under the age of 15 have lost either a mother or both parents to AIDS.[25] These numbers do not begin to tell the searing stories of children who, while they grieve for ailing or dead parents, must run households, work in the fields, and cope with the social stigma and isolation associated with AIDS.

A staggering 92 percent of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa where, outside of the family, few—if any—avenues of support are available.[26] Grandparents and other relatives have absorbed some of the responsibility for caring for AIDS orphans, but family networks are sagging under the weight of the epidemic. Tragically, orphans who lack the support of relatives remain on their own in child-headed households.

Children orphaned by AIDS face great challenges. They run the risk of being malnourished and are likely to be pulled out of school when their guardians can no longer afford to pay for their education.[27] Schooling and health care may also be denied because of the stigma associated with the disease. Orphans are more likely to be sexually abused and forced into exploitative situations because they are emotionally vulnerable and financially dependent.

Communities in Africa are addressing the crisis in several ways. Groups are working to provide food, clothing, and school fees to orphans and their families and to help children cope with the feelings of loss, shame, and fear they experience before and after a parent dies. Communities and groups are also working to build children's capacity to cope with the burden of the disease.

*The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations Children's Fund define AIDS orphans as children who, between the time the epidemic began and the end of 1999, had lost their mother or both parents to AIDS before reaching the age of 15. Some of the children are no longer alive, and others are no longer under the age of 15.[28]

"Women's Vision,"
The New Vision,
Uganda
March 8, 2000

Children Taking on More Than They Can Handle

by Barbara Bitangaro

Nakanjako who lives in a slum in Makindye has just turned 13. Her father and mother are both dead and she has to look after her six-year-old brother.

Nakanjako is not alone in a world of orphans whose plight is being exploited by society, particularly men who demand sex for favors. The fact that her parent died of AIDS is another stigma she has to reckon with.

Orphanages should be seen as a last resort.

"We are seeing an increasing number of orphans as a result of AIDS, especially those we call 'total orphans' or who have lost both parents," says the Director of the National Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (NACWOLA), Ms. Beatrice Were.

Were explains that the number of child-headed households in the country is increasing. While the majority of orphans live with their extended families, many still face the same challenges of those who live on their own.

The problems children face as a result of HIV/AIDS begin long before their parents die, because they live in households where sickness has drained the resources, Were explains. Nakanjako had to leave school to tend to her parents as their health deteriorated and to also take care of her baby brother. She had to take on an adult role much earlier than she had expected. Worse still, her mother died in her arms, leaving her a traumatised child, a counsellor revealed.

Psychologists explain that children who lose a parent to AIDS suffer grief and confusion like any other child who has lost a parent. But there are differences. The psychological impact is greater when the parent dies of AIDS than of other causes, like an accident. An AIDS patient will suffer for a long time, especially in the developing world where the drugs to alleviate pain are not affordable. The child will experience all this pain.

Janet Nambi, head of the Department of Mental Health and Community Psychology, says that "with every loss, there is grief, but this is complicated in a sense that a lot of children are exposed to the suffering of their parents before they die. Apart from this exposure, some are made to care for their sick parents and assume adult responsibility."

Both social workers agree that the social stigma adversely affects children orphaned by AIDS. Nambi, who has conducted research in Rakai where the devastating effects of AIDS can be seen, reveals that "the children were angry at their parents for engaging in destructive behaviour and angry at the fact that they cannot enjoy a normal child's life."

In the school environment, these children's grief was not understood or recognised and they were therefore not given the necessary support. At their parents' death, they were the ones being sent on errands. At school, they were expected to perform well.

Ms. Were says that many adults looking after children orphaned by AIDS usually demand that the children be tested before the guardian pays school fees for them. Others, she says, ignore the child's health, with the view that the child could be sick and that there is nothing one can do.

"Many such children die of neglect," says Were. Yet, about two-thirds of children born to HIV-positive mothers do not contract the infection and do grow up as healthy children.

According to Were, children must be prepared for their parents' sickness and eventual death. This way, they feel trusted

by their parents. The children should also be prepared psychologically and socially for what to expect. The children should also be given a chance to decide who is to be their guardian.

"AIDS gives infected people a lot of time to live. So parents should be encouraged to make plans for their children," she adds. Were says that research conducted by NACWOLA in five divisions in Kampala show that such children found it easier to adjust after their parents' death.

Orphanages should be seen as a last resort, many social workers suggest. "In Africa, our social security has always been the extended family, and we should not destroy the fibre that holds us together," says Were. ■

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About Women's Edition

Women's Edition is a global activity of the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) that brings together senior women editors and producers from influential media organizations around the world to examine and report on issues affecting women's health and status. Women's Edition was launched in 1993 and is currently funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the MEASURE *Communication* project. Since 1999, the Ford Foundation has funded the participation of a representative of the Vietnamese media.

The 1999 Women's Edition members were selected from among a large group of qualified applicants. The group represented Costa Rica, Egypt, Ghana, India, Kenya, the Philippines, Romania, South Africa, Uganda, and Vietnam. Their combined audiences number an estimated 32 million.

The mission of Women's Edition is to inform policy decisions through accurate and timely media coverage that reflects women's needs and perspectives. By providing information to millions of women in developing countries on issues that affect them, Women's Edition also attempts to shape public discussion of the problems and helps women make informed decisions on matters related to their livelihood.

The Women's Edition journalists meet twice each year for week-long seminars to examine reproductive health and associated issues, to meet with experts, and to identify strategies for providing solid media coverage of the topics. The first Women's Edition seminar of 1999 investigated families in transition.

Women's Edition members produced the programs and supplements in this collection following their participation in the seminar. Coverage included pull-out sections in newspapers, feature stories, news reports, editorials, and talk shows.

Women's Edition also seeks to build institutional capability among media organizations. The journalists share their experiences with colleagues through their local journalism associations. They also give presentations at conferences and organize and lead training in topics they have dealt with at the seminars.

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